



Embedded settlement intentions: The case of Ukrainians in Madrid

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at finding out whether the immigrant's relational environment can explain its settlement intentions in the host country. The article focuses on the operationalization and applicability of Granovetter's (1985) version of the concept of embeddedness. The personal networks data of Ukrainian immigrants residing in Madrid are examined by using the partial least squares structural equation modelling. The results reveal not only the existence of statistically significant relationships between the relational environment of the immigrant and the settlement intentions for various time horizons, but above all provide information on the exact degree of the influence of each different dimension of embeddedness.

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1. Introduction

The goal of this article is to analyze and compare the personal networks of Ukrainian immigrants residing in the Region of Madrid, in order to understand how these networks operate, and identify their connection with their intentions to settle. Granovetter's (1985) theoretical assumption about social action and embeddedness has been adopted, where behaviour and intentions of the actors cannot be explained by individual factors only, but rather they are understood as totally embedded within a broader setting, within a context of social relations that function as a system imposing constraints and opportunities to individuals. According to the Granovetter's (1973) weak ties theory these constraints and opportunities are associated with the presence and distribution of weak and strong ties articulating issues of social cohesion and social homogeneity, as well as informing about access to diverse information and novel ideas. This is to say that we can expect the greater the social cohesion, the smaller the degree of freedom in forming intentions of future place of residence and at the same time, the greater the orientation towards a similar type of intention in accordance with the cohesive group. Thereby, it is assumed here that the intentional process and the reasons for settlement/return/re-migration will result from the continuous interaction of migration projects with the social and relational environment.

Gurak and Cases (1992) were among the first who stressed importance of social networks in shaping mobility patterns of

migrants and also underlined the significance of weak ties among the migrants in this process. In the same period, other studies (Boyd, 1989; Fawcett, 1989) highlighted that social networks are an important determinant of migration plans. Since then, we can observe that increasing importance has been attributed to social relationships in migration intention and decision research. However, the different understandings and uses of the concept of social networks hinder a comparison of results of these works. Likewise, the use of the concept of embeddedness in migration research is often very broad and unclear and, above all, measurement tools are lacking. Although this concept is difficult to operationalize, one of the purposes of this paper is to develop an analytical framework to more rigorously explain settlement intentions in the host country through different dimensions/levels of embeddedness; and to assess which aspects of social networks are related to the future place of residence intentions of immigrants.

1.1. Social networks, intentions and decision-making choices in migration

Cassarino (2004) pointed out that the intentions of immigrants to remain in the host country or return to the home country, and the strategies they develop within a relational system, are shaped by the social, economic and institutional contexts existing in both the home and host country. Similarly, referring to the decision-making process in general, Haug (2008) specified that this process of actors representing the micro level is embedded within the social context or meso level which, at the same time is conditioned by the underlying macro-structures. In this way, decisions made are not based solely on economic criteria (cost-benefit analysis), but rather deci-

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sions involve more complex actions that can only be understood in the broader context of a system of relations and exchanges of material, cultural and symbolic goods. These strategies and decisions are influenced by the factors mentioned above, but at the same time, their development will have positive or negative implications on the lives of immigrants. Thereby, studying an isolated individual or the migration as a variable or as an entity would entail many limitations to the analysis of the phenomenon as a whole. It is therefore important to always bear in mind that the individual is part of a nucleus which is rooted in families or in the existence of communities, within a socio-cultural-relational context. Thus, to investigate the migration from the category of social relationships (being individuals or communities), requires developing a form of articulation of the micro-structural conditions defined by the individual characteristics of the actors (e.g. the family structure), while also accounting for the influence of economic, cultural, social and political determinants of social action, as they all constitute the framework for the study of social networks. As far as this approach is concerned, it extends the explanatory power of social reality and the action taken by the migrant, compared with theories based only on attributes of macro and/or micro level. Moreover, as [Boyd \(1989: 642\)](#) states “(. . .) studying networks, particularly those linked to family and household, permits understanding migration as a social product – not as the sole result of individual decisions made by individual actors, not as the sole result of economic or political parameters, but rather as an outcome of all these factors in interaction”. In fact, the perspective on social relations in migration outlined here represents an intermediate level of theoretical and analytical model of international migration developed by [Faist \(1997\)](#). As for the macro level, also called the structural level, it is understood as the political-economic-cultural structure of the international system, where both the home country and the host country are taken into account; while the micro level, also called individual level, embodies the degree of freedom or autonomy to make decisions. The intermediate (or meso) level enables the connection between the micro and macro levels through social relationships that in collectives and social networks constitutes different sets of intermediate structures, and whose resources are related to the structure of opportunities ([Faist, 1997](#)).

During last two decades there has been an increasing interest in the study of role of meso-level variables in migration decision-making, especially regarding the initial phase of emigration from the country of origin (e.g. [Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993](#)). Still, the body of literature paying attention to social networks and their impact on settlement (or return) decision-making process of those already in destination country is slim (e.g. [Stamm, 2006](#)). Interestingly, most of these studies make use of network theory of migration, using the concept of social capital as an analytical tool and just few authors approach this phenomenon with the perspective of social network analysis. Although the studies employing the network theory of migration revealed some interesting results and the relational variables showed their inherent explanatory power, the data on the social relations has not been collected systematically and, thus does not allow a thorough analysis of their impact on intentional and decisional migration process. Some works, exemplify the great potential of social network analysis for explaining the processes of adaptation to the host country through a rigorous study of compositional and structural variables of migrant's personal networks ([Bolibar et al., 2015](#); [De Miguel Luken et al., 2007](#); [Lubbers and Molina, 2013](#); [Maya-Jariego and Armitage, 2007](#)) even if it does not directly tackle migration decision-making phenomena. The current article aims to provide a more profound understanding of the implication of migrants' social ties (and their structure) in decision-making to stay in the host country by using personal networks analysis perspective.

2. Embeddedness: origins and application in migration studies

The concept of embeddedness was introduced in the social sciences by Karl Polanyi in the early nineteen sixties to describe the inclusion of economic relations in social relationships during the transition to capitalism in the Western societies ([Gómez Fonseca, 2004](#)). More specifically, [Polanyi \(2001\)](#) suggested that economic action and social relations were deeply intertwined and in his view embeddedness represented the fact that the economy is embedded in social relations and that economic processes are products of these relationships. Thus, the actors were not only pursuing economic gains, but were also concerned with their social position and social assets. Although Polanyi provided this novel idea, he did not offer an accurate and narrow definition of the concept of embeddedness, and barely used it in his analysis. Later, in the 1980s and 90s the concept was re-introduced and disseminated in sociology by [Granovetter \(1985\)](#), according to whom subjects' actions are embedded in a network of relationships that provide or deny access to certain resources and influence their attitudes, behaviours and cognitions. This understanding of the concept was criticized by Bourdieu who reproached Granovetter for its exclusive focus on personal interaction and low efficiency when dealing with structural factors ([Ménard and Shirley, 2005](#)). Following this criticism, Bourdieu proposed the alternative concept named *field*, which is a broader concept that also considers the macro-structural effects. Nevertheless, the limitation of this concept is that “(. . .) it is difficult to assess the exact impact of a field, since the mechanism of pressure of the structure on the actors is unknown” ([Caudillo, 2007](#)). Thanks to Granovetter who linked the concept of embeddedness to the paradigm of social network analysis, this concept became more manageable and useful. That is why we chose to use Granovetter's concept. Although Granovetter demonstrates his thesis in the field of economic behaviour, he argues that this approach can be extrapolated to all human conduct. Applying his theoretical position to the object of the present study we can interpret that the individual does not act only according to their individual attributes, but rather their intentions and decisions can be explained with more rigor by studying the degree of embeddedness, where the intentional process and the reasons for settlement/return/re-emigration will be the result of the trajectory of the migratory project in interaction with a much wider context that functions as a system, imposing constraints and opportunities onto individuals. The concept of embeddedness has been applied to different cases and topics, but always with the same purpose: to explore the phenomenon in a more integrated manner. [Granovetter \(1985\)](#) distinguished between structural and relational embeddedness, suggesting a separation of the effects of individual links and the impact of network structure on human behaviour.

In migration decision-making research, just as in other research topics, the concept of embeddedness has taken different forms and dimensions. Many of the studies use a concept of embeddedness that is no longer the one defined by Granovetter, but rather an extension of social network dimensions through other dimensions (economic, institutional, psychosocial or territorial), understood as structures in which the individual acts (see e.g., study of mixed embeddedness applied to the sustainability of return in: [Johansson 2008](#); [Van Houte and De Koning, 2008](#); [Van Houte and Davids, 2008](#)). Some studies focus more on an analysis of social capital as a specific demonstration of the phenomenon of social embeddedness. The most classic work in this sense was done by [Portes and Sensenbrenner \(1993\)](#). As [Portes \(1995\)](#) explains, the concept of social capital is a product of embeddedness and refers to an individual's ability to mobilize resources. [Portes and Sensenbrenner \(1993\)](#), concentrate on the economic action of migrants, and also

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